

Green Collar

By Dean Baker

Global warming still may not be on the policy agenda in Washington, but the long hot days of summer put it in the minds of many people across the country. The vast majority of scientists agree that we must act soon to limit the damage from the accumulation of greenhouse gases. Yet little progress has been made toward achieving even the first steps laid out in the 1997 international agreement reached in Kyoto, Japan.

If the corporate executives in coal, oil and other polluting industries have their way, global warming will never appear on the policy agenda. These industries are concerned about threats to their

such as finance, health care, teaching or retail trade. In most of these industries, it is difficult to imagine how it would

An environmental economist shows that labor doesn't have to confront global warming with fear.

even be possible for environmental regulations to cost jobs.

But even in manufacturing, Goodstein documents numerous studies showing that job losses attributable to environmental regulation are minimal. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, found that the number of jobs lost due to environmental regulation has averaged less than 3,000 per year. By comparison, job loss in manufacturing has averaged close to 30,000 per month over the past year and a half. Even in the most extreme cases, such as coal mining in Appalachia and logging in the Northwest, it turns out that environmental regulation has not been the primary cause of job loss.

In the coal industry, the real culprit has been increased produc-

tivity, as strip-mining has replaced labor-intensive underground mining. Coal production has actually increased since 1980, while employment has fallen by almost 60 percent. In forestry, jobs have been eliminated by rising productivity and a shift of investment to the South to take advantage of low-cost labor. Employment in the industry had already fallen by nearly 40 percent from its 1978 peak before the first logging restrictions went into effect in 1991. By comparison, the jobs lost due to environmental restrictions probably will not even be one-fifth as large. But regardless of this reality, unemployed miners and lumber workers are likely to blame environmentalists for their fate.

As Goodstein points out, the national media have been willing to uncritically repeat the industry line on jobs and the environment, thereby building the myth and creating a political environment that is often hostile to environmental regula-

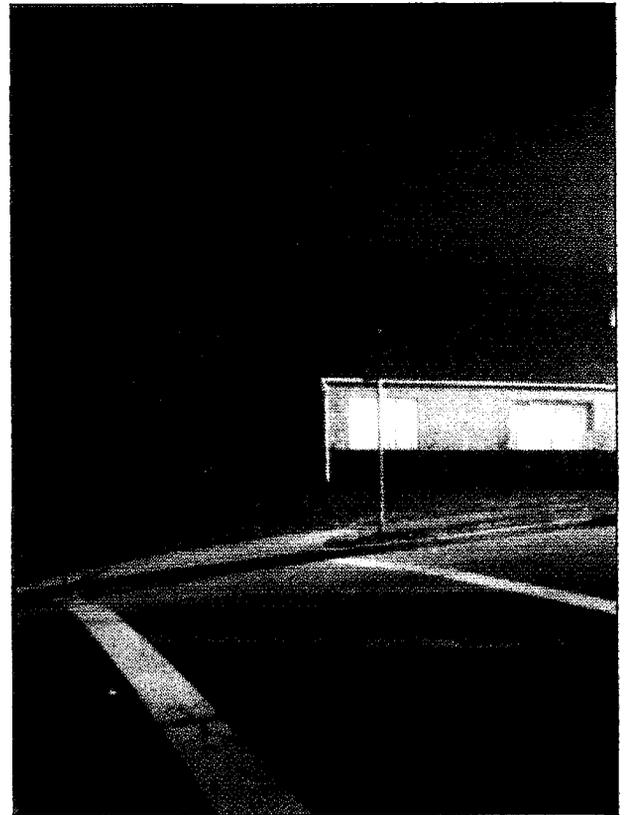
The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment

By Eban Goodstein
Island Press
195 pages, \$27.50

profits. But to make the political case, they've tried to take the nation's workers hostage, threatening them with massive job losses if steps are taken to curtail the emissions of greenhouse gases. Eban Goodstein argues compellingly in *The Trade-Off Myth: Fact and Fiction About Jobs and the Environment* that workers have little to fear.

Goodstein is an environmental economist (disclosure: also a personal friend) who takes both the environment and jobs seriously. He has worked with the Economic Policy Institute over the past six years to create a pro-labor environmental agenda. In this time he has done several important studies analyzing aspects of the jobs-environment trade-off.

As the title of his book suggests, much of this work involves dispelling myths. Recent polls have showed that close to one third of all workers fear that environmental regulations may cost them their jobs. Yet job losses that can actually be attributed to environmental regulation are relatively few. Currently close to 80 percent of workers are employed in service industries,



Untitled #2077 by Todd Hido, 1997. Chromogenic print. From *Sites Around the City: Art and Environment*, to be shown next spring at the Arizona State University Art Museum.

WHOSE TRADE ORGANIZATION?



AN ASSESSMENT OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION FROM PUBLIC CITIZEN'S GLOBAL TRADE WATCH

LATE THIS YEAR, THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION'S SEATTLE MINISTERIAL will shape globalization in the new millenium. When the WTO was being debated five years ago, government officials scoffed at critics' fears that the new organization would undermine food safety, environmental policy or human rights in the U.S. and abroad.

NOW IT TURNS OUT THE CRITICS WERE RIGHT.

- Key health, safety, environmental and labor laws are being unraveled in the U.S. and throughout the world . . .
- Dozens of safety standards in the U.S. and abroad are being successfully challenged as "barriers to trade" . . .
- The economic benefits promised by politicians have never materialized . . .

This 220-page book is the only comprehensive assessment of the WTO's actual performance to date.

**ORDER YOUR COPY OF THIS
IMPORTANT BOOK TODAY**
for only \$18.50 (includes
shipping/handling).

Order online at [www.citizen.org/
pctrade/publications/wtobook.htm](http://www.citizen.org/pctrade/publications/wtobook.htm)
or send check or money order to:
Dept. BWTOEDT, Public
Citizen, 1600 20th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20009-1001

tion. The worker who lost his job because of federal logging restrictions was a big story in the national news. The much larger group of workers who lost their jobs because the lumber mills moved to the South never got mentioned.

No matter how many jobs are actually lost as a result of environmental regulation, for the workers affected, it is still a disaster. The lumber workers in Oregon or the coal miners in West Virginia are unlikely ever to see another job that pays them anywhere near what they earn in these industries. It is unfair that they alone should be asked to pay the price of protecting the environment. Fairness demands real and substantial compensation for workers who lose their jobs due to environmental regulations. Goodstein analyzes the government programs that have been established to retrain workers and sustain the communities most affected by environmental regulations. He shows where and why they have succeeded, and more often, how they have failed.

While the book does much to attack the half-truths surrounding jobs and the environment, Goodstein does help to foster one myth: the possibility that green jobs may be more labor intensive. The discussion is reasonable, and Goodstein rightly points out that more labor-intensive jobs tend to be lower-paying jobs, but it would be better not to even raise the issue.

There is no reason for environmentalists, or anyone else, to prefer greater labor intensity of production. We can always find things for people to do, and if we can't, then most of us would be happy to work fewer hours. The myth that environmentalism is tied to more labor-intensive technologies helps promote the worst stereotypes of environmentalists as yuppies; the idea that we would prefer workers give up high-paying jobs in factories so that they can grow organic vegetables in their backyards invites contempt from the vast majority of working people. Goodstein certainly is not arguing anything of this sort, but the linking of environmentalism and labor-intensive employment may encourage less sophisticated readers to think in these terms.

As useful as this book will be to someone negotiating the dangerous turf between labor and the environ-

ment, the labor side of this discussion may believe that its concerns have been given short shrift. It's not that they can legitimately claim that Goodstein has low-balled the likely jobs impact of the Kyoto agreement. The discussion here is thoughtful and cautious. One can find industries where the Kyoto agreement likely will have a more significant impact than is suggested here. The most obvious example is the automobile industry. Complying with Kyoto may lead to no reduction in the number of vehicles being sold, but it will lead to a large shift from light trucks and SUVs to more fuel-efficient small cars. Virtually all the trucks and SUVs sold in this country are made by highly paid autoworkers in the United States (no one else buys these things). Disproportionately, the fuel-efficient cars that replace them will be made by foreign car manufacturers.

But the real reason why labor will be uncomfortable with this book is that they know they are looking at a situation where, whatever the job loss, they can count on very little assistance from the government. Having pushed through its trade deals without providing any serious compensation for the affected workers, the Clinton-Gore administration has no credibility on this issue when it comes to Kyoto. The fact that neither labor nor the environmental movement can trust this administration makes it all the more difficult to try to create some secure common ground. One could hope for a united front where the two constituencies push jointly for jobs and the environment—but Clinton can easily play one off against the other, promising environmentalists to move forward on Kyoto while doing nothing for workers.

However difficult the task, a labor-environment coalition can't let Clinton get away with this. Their unity is vital to the progress of both movements. This book will be helpful for those willing to try. ■

Dean Baker, a senior research fellow at The Preamble Center, writes a weekly media commentary, *The Economic Reporting Review*, available online at www.fair.org.

Critical Condition

by Joshua Rothkopf

Whoever directed *Bringing Out the Dead*, with its psychotic paramedics cruising the rain-soaked streets of Hell's Kitchen in search of late-night redemption and the occasional gunshot victim, sure has cribbed up on his Scorsese—he really nailed it with the paranoia and the hookers and that troubled internal monologue. OK so he is Martin Scorsese. This seems to be cause for celebration among many critics. But what they see as a return to form is, to my eyes, a retreat to form—not necessarily a bad thing when the models in question are *Taxi Driver* and *After Hours*. It's a perfect match but somehow feels dead on arrival.

The '90s have been a topsy-turvy decade for Scorsese, who can't seem to sustain creative growth—of which he continues to show sporadic evidence—without interrupting his momentum for redundant forays into inconsequence: *Casino* is *GoodFellas* stripped of charm and coherence; his lurid remake of *Cape Fear* (was that really necessary?) neatly

Bringing Out the Dead
Directed by Martin Scorsese

negates the elegant restraint of *The Age of Innocence*. *Kundun* signaled a spiritual commitment that felt like a breakthrough; *Bringing Out the Dead* is the least audacious work of his career.

I'm being hard on Scorsese because he is supposed to be Saint Cinema—he carries a critical prestige that even extends to public events like the Oscars: A presenter of the highest authority, he's too good to ever win. *Bringing Out the Dead* just might change that. It's exactly the kind of mannerist work that will satisfy viewers whose taste for edginess began with *Mean Streets* and ended 20 years ago just shy of *Raging Bull*.

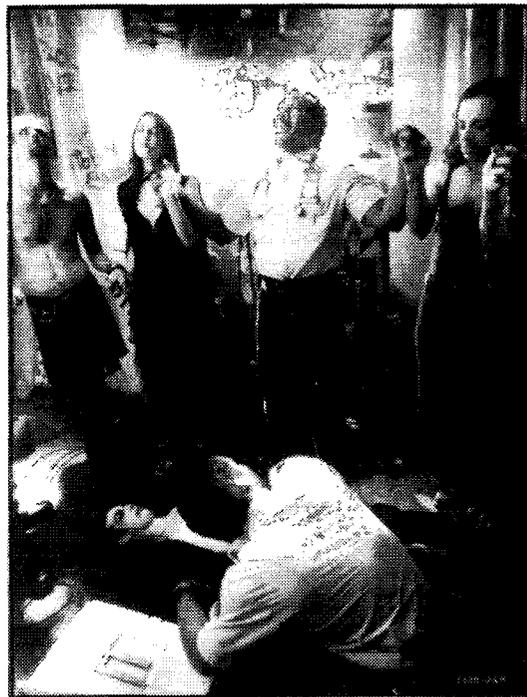
Still, Scorsese allows for a range of expressiveness that strains against the tired material to good result. Nicolas Cage comes up with all sorts of imaginative ways of seething in the blocked part of Frank Pierce, an EMS technician and self-described "grief mop." Haunted by the ghosts of those he couldn't save, Frank

makes for a particularly passive center: He pleads to be fired and is denied, he can barely look out the window and rarely drives the ambulance, leaving that to his rotating shift partner. Droopy and unshaven, Cage works with his eyes in a quiet, internal performance, while his voice-over suggests more provocative frustrations: "I hadn't saved anyone in months."

Early in the film, he meets his potential savior—the nervous daughter of a stroke victim—and I should now probably thank the screenwriter, Paul Schrader, for emphasizing that this character is named Mary. (Patricia Arquette, in damaged little-girl voice and an ex-junkie's haircut with blond roots, adds gravity to what could have been a very twitchy part.)

As Frank and Mary begin to make nice—she's often at the hospital waiting for news—*Bringing Out the Dead* eases into a predictable pattern that seems built from some kind of spiritual shorthand: Frank drinks from the oasis of humane concern, only to return to the streets for increasingly brutal episodes. Cage and Arquette do sensitive work together (they're a real-life couple) but I found myself wishing their characters started further apart; Frank and Mary are simpatico from their first encounter, anticipating each other's hurts and needs like siblings. It's all very supportive.

Bringing Out the Dead is appealingly verbal and often comes across like a Woody Allen comedy. The ambulance is Frank's harried skull and when the dispatcher's voice squeals through, it pleads for his attention before getting a response. (The smart-alecky voice is Scorsese's—shades of his unhinged back-seat passenger from *Taxi Driver*.) One emergency resuscitation becomes a holy-roller's revival when Frank's shift partner, Marcus (Ving Rhames with glinting eyes and a perpetual wink), sees an opportunity to save some souls: hands are joined, a sermon is delivered, the victim recovers, absurdly.



PHIL CARUSO

Nicolas Cage and Ving Rhames stage a revival.

It's this loopy surreal tone that works best, and while *Bringing Out the Dead* never succumbs to bathos, it could have used more irreverence. When Frank finally does explode (he's no Travis Bickle, but you knew it was coming), the film approaches an exhilarating mania: Scorsese's camera starts doing somersaults around the racing white streak of an ambulance, bottles are swigged, punk by the Clash hammers away on the soundtrack. It's a speedy, gonzo kind of filmmaking—like the last 20 adrenalized minutes of *GoodFellas*—that would have served all the ambulance scenes just as well, making Mary more crucial to Frank's sanity: a shield from hyperactivity and gore.

Instead, Scorsese is satisfied with disconnected details, like the brief glimpse of some drug vials furtively snatched from the pavement next to a dying dealer. Are we supposed to feel closer to a sleepless paramedic because his bookshelf happens to contain works by Shelley and Italo Calvino? "Just don't meditate on it," advises Marcus, calmly chomping on his cigar and grinning; *Bringing Out the Dead* has less to do with the condition of suffering than with the pain of caring too much. There's medicine for that too, the film seems to say, but Scorsese's is a tidy prescription: "Don't make me take off my sunglasses," yells one fed-up hospital guard. It's the truest line in a film as detachable as a band-aid. ■